

INTRODUCTION.

A LONG narrow volume, measuring $15\frac{1}{2}$ by $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches and containing 186 pages of parchment rudely bound together, forms the earliest "Register Booke of y^e Church of Rayvinstondall." Like most of its kind it has suffered from neglect and ill-usage, which have combined to render portions almost illegible. The last pages, in particular, recording the Burials from 1648 to 1655, are so much discoloured from the effects of damp or some other cause as to add considerably to a transcriber's difficulties.

These Registers are, it is believed, the oldest records extant in the original which the Parish possesses. It seems very desirable, therefore, that they should in some form or other be preserved in perpetuity; and not merely preserved but at the same time made more accessible to all who may wish to consult them. With this object in view, I have ventured to undertake their publication.

In order that it may be as faithful a reproduction of the original as is possible, this first volume is an exact copy, page for page, line for line, letter for letter; nothing has been added by way of suggestion where the reading was doubtful, nothing has been omitted.

The registration of deaths, and perhaps of burials, dates from very ancient times; that of baptisms appears to have been of later origin. The keeping of Church Registers by the Clergy was instituted by law in 1538; subsequently, in 1597, these Registers were to be of parchment: the Canon Law of 1603 further required that the Churchwardens should forward to the Bishop or his Chancellor, annually, a true copy of each year's entries. This duty of registration was discharged only very indifferently by the majority of the Clergy, the work being generally entrusted to the parish clerk; and the forwarding of the Ravenstonedale duplicates does not seem to have been commenced until the year 1667, at least none of an older date are in existence. From this year, however, the Transcripts are, with but few exceptions, continuous, and have proved invaluable in supplying gaps caused presumably by the corresponding page of the Register having first become loose and then lost.

Of the Ravenstonedale Transcripts kept in the Carlisle Diocesan Registry, it may be remarked that the only missing years from 1667

to 1710 are those of 1682, 1684, 1686, 1688, 1693, 1703, 1707, 1708, and 1709. It is quite possible that even these may be recovered eventually, if, as is most probable, they have strayed into the bundle of some other parish.

"Henery Shawe, clerk of y^e parish," signs the Transcript for 1667; "Tho. Dodson," that for 1668, while all the rest from 1670 to 1720 are subscribed by "Wm. Balife, parish clerk." The Transcript for 1673 is signed by "Anth: Prockter, minister, Tho: Dennis, Anthony ffothergill, Thomas Parkin," and the same incumbent examines that for 1677 as "curate." There is only one presentment, viz., in 1710, by "Tho. Tolmin, minister of Ravenstonedale. William Parkin, John Hunter, Churchwardens." This is all the information as to the church officials that can be gathered from these duplicates.

In the Ravenstonedale Registers little will be found beyond a plain matter-of-fact record of Baptisms, Weddings, and Burials,—here and there, however, it is possible to read between the lines.

During the religious anarchy of the Cromwellian usurpation the disturbed state of the parish as regards matters ecclesiastical may be deduced from the variations in the writing of the Marriage entries,—seeming to point to a frequent change of minister. The "Bare Bones" Parliament of 1653 enacted a law to secularize the marriage rite by making it a civil contract. This accounts for there having been no weddings in the parish from 1653 to 1657, parties being obliged to journey to "Appellbye" or "Kendall" to be married by "y^e maire" or some other "Justiss" of the Peace.

It seems strange that no mention is anywhere made of that dread visitant,—the Plague. Yet it is very evident that our parish did not escape its ravages. In 1579, 1588, and again in 1597—during the whole of which period the pestilence was more or less prevalent throughout the northern counties—the mortality in Ravenstonedale was abnormally high. But it was not until the spring of 1623 that the storm burst in its full fury. The entries for that year, though obviously incomplete, three months being omitted, give a death-roll of 48, or 33 above the average for that period. The scribe himself appears to have fallen a victim to the epidemic, for, after the gap following the entry of February 22nd the handwriting is changed. The great London outbreak of 1665 does not appear to have reached Ravenstonedale.

It may here be noted that another epidemic, no less deadly than the Plague, swept over the parish in 1730. In that year 53 deaths occurred, at a time when the average was only 17. The mortality was highest in June, in which month 16 burials are recorded. It is somewhat curious that there is, I believe, no evidence of this visitation having been prevalent in the neighbouring

parishes; nor am I aware of any local tradition defining its nature. Perhaps now some light may be thrown upon it.

It will be seen that in the year 1678 the "Woollen" Act was enforced in Ravenstonedale as also in other parishes in the vicinity. The object of the enactment was, no doubt, to give a stimulus to the home manufacture of woollen goods.

Of the old sixteenth century names few are left. The Adamthwaites, Bovells, Cawtleys, Chamberlaines, Dents, Greens, Halls, Murthwaites, Peares, Pinders, and Rogersons have all disappeared: the Bousfields, Fawcetts and Shaws, once so numerous, have now only one or two representatives; the Fothergills alone remain unaffected by the lapse of three centuries.

As of names, so of places: many of the old homesteads are gone. "Keldhead," "Howkeld," "Galehead," "Mires," "Askgill," "Breckfoot," "Crog" (?) and others seem to be unknown to the present inhabitants of the Dale, and their sites are only of doubtful identification.

As the proceeds derived from the sale of "Parish Registers" seldom cover the cost of publication, I take this opportunity of tendering my acknowledgments to the forty-one Subscribers, whose names are appended to this volume, for the support they have accorded to my undertaking.

I have also to express my indebtedness to our Diocesan Registrar (A. N. Bowman, Esq.) for affording me every facility for examining the Transcripts and other old documents preserved in the Bishop's Registry.
